



March 8, 2022

## College 101: What does have to do with college admissions?



Would you guess boost applications? Yup! Colleges that make it into the tournament [see a much bigger increase in applications](#) (particularly the underdogs) than schools that aren't featured at this event.

Why does this matter? Great question! As rising seniors, the subject of how to develop a college list will become more important over the coming months. It's easy to become excited about a school with great buzz (basketball or otherwise), but the true advantage of a college experience comes from being in the classroom (and on stage for students continuing in the arts) not the audience. Being aware of the subliminal impact something like March Madness can have is a reminder that there are good and not-so-good reasons to add schools to a college list.

Another not-so-good source of college names to consider? *U.S. News & World Report*. Why? Their calculations include popularity (what college presidents think about other institutions – huh?) and institutional wealth. The result? A list of "top" admission lottery schools (highly selective schools – think exceptional GPA and ACT scores – with extremely low acceptance rates) that has nothing to do with any individual student's experience.

No ranking system can predict an individual student's outcome. So, what steps should a rising senior take to develop a list of colleges to consider? Best question ever! Start with your interests. What do you want to think about? What skills do you believe you need to develop? Why? **They're no right or wrong answers only the answers that make sense to you.** Make it a habit to do routine personal interest check-ins. *Worried that your answers might change? Throw a wide net interest wise and give yourself permission to reevaluate/reconsider as you gather additional data.* This isn't about deciding on majors and careers as much as starting to orient your future studies toward paths that you are willing to invest your best self into. "Does a school have what I want in terms of..... and ..... and ....." marks the perfect starting point.

Fortunately, there are many online tools that can help with this process including [BigFuture](#), [CollegeData](#), [College Raptor](#), [Collegexpress](#), [Cappex](#), [College Factual](#), and [College Greenlight](#) (focused on 1<sup>st</sup> generation/underrepresented applicants). They all provide useful tools to help students and families consider different possibilities within the college universe. Research has shown that [the real differences in college outcomes exist at the departmental level, or within the classrooms of individual professors](#), who teach with a great deal of autonomy under the principles of academic freedom. It's the professors you work with while you're there that matters (not the school mascot emblazoned on a sweatshirt). The "best" college decisions come from students who've actively engaged with potential professors/classmates (GO auditions!), read course catalogs/professor bios and sat in on classes before they arrive on campus! Your college radar improves with each college visit!

### Important information for college applications:

SPCPA School Code: 242 284

Counselor: Alison Green  
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School Information:  
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High achieving, low income juniors are encouraged to consider applying for the free QuestBridge College Prep Scholars Program.

**QuestBridge Scholars** have access to full scholarship summer programs, excellence awards (laptops, free college visits, personalized essay reviews, etc.), and an admission and financial aid advantage (full four-year scholarships) at the 45 QuestBridge partner schools such as Stanford, Princeton, Northwestern and the University of Southern California (to name a few).

Typical QuestBridge Scholars have high school transcripts with mainly A's (in the most challenging courses available); a 1270+ PSAT and/or 26+ ACT score and come from a family earning less than \$65,000 annually (family of 4).

Interested SPCPA students are encouraged to pay particular attention to the [Quest for Excellence: Arts](#) option of the QuestBridge Scholar application as it provides special benefits for visual and/or performing artists.

**Applications are due March 24, 2022.**

Click [here](#) for more details or contact Ms. Green (contact information listed above) for more information.



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So, you took the ACT. Should you take the SAT as well? Good question! Before spending time preparing for the SAT test format, it is important to note that **every college and university accepts both tests**. Whether one test is better for a particular student than another totally depends on the results of the test (not the name of the test).

It really comes down to: a) how the two tests differ and b) whether or not those differences matter to you.

#### Difference 1: Math

The ACT math section typically tests more math concepts (particularly geometry, trig functions, logarithms, and matrices) without providing formulas but allows for a calculator for all parts. **If you always use a calculator, the ACT test may be better for you.**

The SAT math section gives you most formulas, focuses on algebra and data analysis but includes a no calculator section. **If you are okay without a calculator and feel strongest in algebra, the SAT may be the better test for you.**

#### Difference 2: Science

Unlike the ACT (which makes use of scientific terms and experiences gathering scientific data), **the SAT doesn't have a defined science section**. Rather, it incorporates some of the chart/graph analysis found in the ACT science test into the other sections. **Science your weakest section? Consider the SAT.**

#### Difference 3: Reading

Not good at quickly remembering where information is found in a passage? The SAT tends to give you more help locating the lines associated with questions related to specific details in a passage. On the SAT, most questions have a line number and the questions proceed in chronological order making it easier to quickly locate the relevant answers. But, the SAT also requires students to provide specific evidence for their answers. The ACT only requires students to select an answer.

#### Difference 4: English (ACT)/Writing (SAT)

The ACT section focuses on grammar, punctuation, sentence structure and main idea questions not found in the SAT. The SAT has more questions related to writing style and the student's ability to select the precise word (vocabulary) or phrase.

#### Difference 5: Time

The ACT allows 36 seconds/question (English) to 60 seconds/question (Math). The SAT allows 48 seconds/question (Writing) to 86 seconds/question (Math with calculator). **In every case, the ACT offers students less time to select their answers.**

**Need more information before you make your decision? Try an SAT practice test: [4Tests](#), [CollegeBoard](#), and/or [PrepScholar](#).**

*Please remember, a positive change in test results will most likely occur because of the time and effort spent preparing for it!*



What's powering your college search?



#### Pros...

- 1-No registration required...you don't have a student loan ad in your face every other paragraph.
- 2-Test scores for test optional colleges... knowing the scores of the students accepted can help you gauge your chances for admissions.
- 3-Wait list statistics...it may help to know how much hope you should have after being placed on the wait list.
- 4-AP Credit...if you're looking for schools where your AP work will actually pay off in terms of college credits, this is the place to search.

#### Cons...

- 1-6 Year Graduation Rates...do you plan to pay for 4 years of college or 6 years? There is no reason why they shouldn't be using the 4 year rate. They don't even bother to show it. And what's worst, is that you can't even search on graduation rates – an important factor to consider!
- 2-Test score search feature is weak...it's going to show schools that are "likely" for admissions. If you want to search for schools likely to offer [merit scholarships](#) you need to be able to search on the 75th% scores and your score should be the highest, not the lowest.
- 3-Size categories are useless... who would group categories into 3 size categories of <2,000, 2,000-15,000, or >15,000?
- 4-No way to search for merit aid...the Common Data Set has information on students without need who receive institutional scholarships, but there's no way to search for it. You can see the average non-need-based aid in the school's individual profile but that's it.
- 5-Can't really compare colleges...unless you register so that you can save your list.